

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

"The Abasement of Congress" *A French Diplomat Reports*

Standard: I. Culture
II. Time, Continuity, and Change
III. People, Places, and Environments
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
IX. Global Connections

Grade Level: 9–12

Objectives: The student will:

- Analyze a primary document
- Determine the relevance of the document to diplomacy
- Determine the role of the French in the United States
- Evaluate the meanings of terms and phrases
- Draw conclusions from the content of the documents

Time: 1–2 class periods

Materials: Documents: **1786** *The Abasement of Congress*

Exercises: *From a French Perspective*

Procedures:

1. Discuss the condition of the U.S. Government in 1786.
 - a. Have students recall the difficulties of governing under the Articles of Confederation.
 - b. Louis Guillaume Otto is the Secretary of the French Legation in Washington. In this letter, Otto was reporting to Vergennes, the French Foreign Minister, on American politics. Why would a French diplomat care about the tenuous nature of the American government? For France, what were the advantages and disadvantages of a weak United States?
2. Distribute the document, *The Abasement of Congress*, and the exercise, *From a French Perspective*. Have students complete the exercise to gain a detailed understanding of the key points of Otto's report.
3. Monitor learning and answer questions from students as they work on the analysis sheet. Review and discuss their findings.
3. Divide the students into pairs. One student in each pair will play the part of French Foreign Minister Vergennes; the other student will be Vergennes'

secretary. Vergennes is reading the letter from Louis Guillaume Otto for the first time. As he reads, "Vergennes" will identify the problems in the U.S. Government aloud, while his "secretary" will record the list.

- 4.** Have the pairs of students share their results with the class. Compare the lists compiled from the document.
- 5.** Discuss the problems noted by the French. What must the United States do to function effectively as a country? Consulting the list of problems, which ones might affect the diplomatic efforts of the government? How can foreign policy be conducted?

Extension Activity:

- 1.** Have students collect additional information about Otto and Vergennes.
- 2.** Prepare a reply to Otto writing from the point of view of the Comte de Vergennes. Ask questions of your "man on scene," Louis Guillaume Otto. He is your eyes and ears in the United States. What more do you want to know about the U.S. Government? Express your concerns and/or happiness regarding events in the United States. ■